

Bradley Park

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Although Peorians believe Laura Bradley Park was merely founded as a playground, it has influenced Peoria's history, recreation, beauty, and fine arts. It is essential to know who founded this influential landmark. The amazing woman who is behind the discovery of the park was Lydia Moss Bradley, born in Vevay, Indiana in 1816. Moss Bradley moved to Peoria in her later years and there married Tobias Smith Bradley. With Tobias Smith Bradley, she had six children. Each child died before reaching the age of twenty. Though she was saddened by the children's deaths, she refused to dwell on them forever and remained happy by busying herself and providing for the city of Peoria. It was significant that Moss Bradley did not stay in the state she was born in because Indiana may have benefited from all of her contributions rather than Peoria. Years later, Tobias Smith Bradley passed away, and Moss Bradley once again went through a period of depression. In the end, she arrived at the same conclusion that she came to after her children's deaths, that she should not waste time shedding tears. Instead, she busied herself by doing great deeds for Peoria, one of which would soon happen, the founding of Laura Bradley Park. In 1894, the park was finally established.

Furthermore, Lydia Moss Bradley founded the park for several reasons including her love for land, the effect her family's deaths had on her, and because she was simply generous. The most urgent reason behind the discovery was her undying love for the land. She cared very much for the land in Peoria and did not wish for it to be polluted and harmed. Therefore, she founded a park where the land would be enjoyed and treated

properly. Unlike some of the other places in Peoria, the grass and flowers in Laura Bradley Park is beautiful because they are well kept and cared for correctly. Another reason behind Laura Bradley Park's discovery was her family members' impact on her. Her husband helped her financially so she had enough money to buy the extra land. The final explanation for the existence of Laura Bradley Park is she was so generous and kind, she decided to found a park.

Laura Bradley Park was officially founded in 1881. The park was named in honor of Lydia Moss Bradley's longest-living child, Laura Bradley, who lived to the mere age of nineteen. She offered the Park District several acres for use as a park; nonetheless, the land remained untouched for thirteen entire years. Each year, Lydia Moss Bradley increased her loan size a small amount and each year the number of acres of land she offered increased and this permanently changed the size of Bradley Park. Finally, in 1894, the park district accepted the offer and Laura Bradley Park was then available to the public. When the park was first unveiled, it contained seven entrances, allowing many people into the park more conveniently. In addition, inside Bradley Park, there was a zoo, a fun house, and a train. Certainly, Laura Bradley Park was one of the most entertaining spots in Peoria, filled with recreational activities and a plethora of fine arts including shows. The public was very pleased because Laura Bradley Park was one of the few public parks in Peoria. Moss Bradley also forbid drinking or smoking in the park in order to keep the land clean. Another person behind the establishment of the park was Oscar F. Dubuis. Dubuis designed this lovely park and the success of Bradley Park encouraged him to go on and design more parks for Peoria, such as Glen Oak Park and so forth. Dubuis has been a very influential man to Peoria.

Year after year, buildings, monuments, and attractions were added to the park. Some of these additions had great impact on Peorians who commonly visited the park. In 1955, Cornstock Theater transferred to Bradley Park. It provides thousands of dollars for Bradley Park each year so more attractions can be added. In 1922, a Japanese garden and a Japanese bridge were installed. The Japanese bridge is considered a landmark and has attracted several tourists to Peoria, providing the city with hundreds of dollars. The Japanese garden has made Bradley Park one of the most gorgeous and beautiful locations in Peoria. Not only were there huge installments in the park, there were important events that occurred. The park was not officially completed until 1905. Ten years were spent renovating, constructing, and designing this park. During the 1960s, the Main Street entrance permanently closed and an entrance opened on Parkside Drive. The layout of the park was permanently changed. Soon enough, the park district gained complete possession of Bradley Park. This was a smart decision because the Peoria Park District has taken fantastic care of the park.

Finally, inside the park there are several places and structures that make Laura Bradley Park and even Peoria unique. Aforementioned, in the 1920s, the Japanese bridge was constructed along with the Japanese gardens. For certain, Bradley Park is the only park in Illinois that contains Japanese themes. Frederic J. Klein drew the plans for the bridge. Years ago, near the Japanese bridge and garden there was a wading pool adaptable to a skating rink. During the summer, the two-foot deep pool served as a wading pool for people to swim and splash in. In the winter, the water in the wading pool froze and it transformed into a skating rink. Hundreds of Peorians learned how to swim and skate in this pool and rink. Some of Peoria's greatest swimmers may have learned

how to swim there. The wading pool and the Japanese themes may show uniqueness; however, there are more activities in the park such as tennis courts, baseball fields, picnic areas, and the fact that it is next to Bradley University. Most visitors of Bradley Park come from the University across the street. Students take advantage of having a park across the street for exercising, jogging its trails, and sitting at a picnic table near the beautiful scenery while they study. [From Illinois Alive, *About Laura Bradley*.

<<http://www.illinoisalive.info/lydia-page1.htm>>. (Sept. 10, 2006); "Building Bradley Park was Slow Work," *Peoria Journal Star*, June 24, 1978; Historic Peoria, *Bradley Park*, <<http://www.historicpeoria.com/entry.php?eid=181&catid=2&cid=1>>. (Sept. 3, 2006); "Bradley Park Entrance to Close," *Peoria Journal Star*, Oct. 14, 1965; Frank Kenny, "It'll be Logs, Roads for Bradley Park," *Peoria Journal Star*, Dec. 6, 1964; Theo Jean Kenyon, "Bradley Park in Danger of Becoming Private?," *Peoria Journal Star*, Mar. 27, 1980; Theo Jean Kenyon, "Ghosts of Glen Oak," *Peoria Journal Star*, Sept. 4, 2006; Jerry Klein, *Peoria*; Theresa W. Lusch, "Bradley Park: Past and Present," *West Bluff Word*, Apr. 1980; "New Highway to Cut Through About 13 Acres of Bradley Park," *Peoria Journal Star*, May 19, 1957; Peoria Historical Society, *Bradley Park*; Peoria Journal Star, *Peoria. . . Impressions of 150 Years*; Steve Strahler, "Who let the Demon in?," *Peoria Journal Star*, Mar. 7, 1976; Allen A. Upton, *Forgotten Angel*; and Monica Vest Wheeler and Steve Wilkinson, *The Grandest Views*.]